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Inaugural Essay

Read March 1825

on

Bilious Colic

by

Smith. M. Price

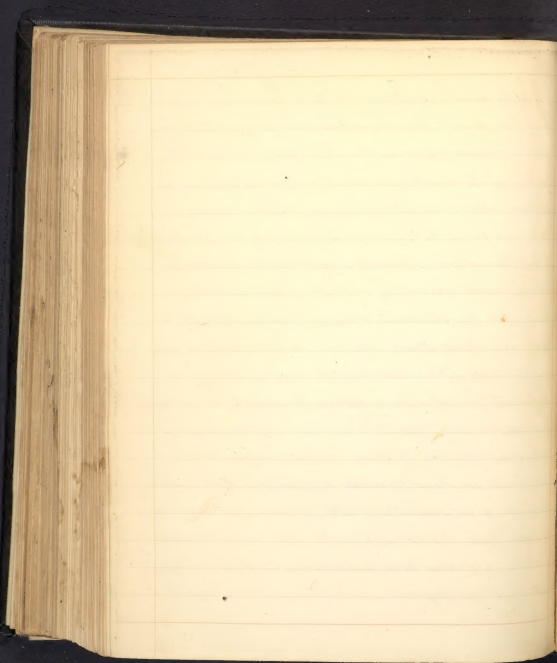
of

Pennsylvania.

Philadelphia Nov 8th 1824.

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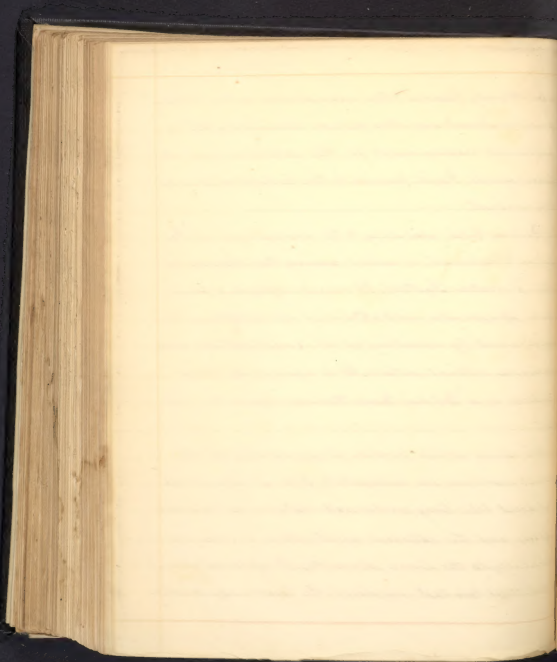
So common is Bilious Colic to our country, and so often has it been described, not only by those who hold a lower grade in the Profession, but also by some of its most respectable members, that no addition either to its Pathology or Treatment can be expected from the limited experience of the student. This observation is indeed so applicable to almost every subject connected with our science, that the candidate for Medical Honours, seldom attempts to offer any thing at all original, or if he does, he generally finds, either that he has been led astray by the deception of a momentary imagination, or that his sentiments have been recorded by other writers. The consideration of these circumstances, renders it difficult for him to make a selection. But leaving for a considerable length of time, pursued my studies in a district of country, the inhabitants of which appeared to be particularly liable to this affection, I had frequent opportunities of treating it.



and thereby became better acquainted with it, than perhaps almost any other disease. Considering this a sufficient inducement for the selection which I have made, I will proceed to the consideration of the subject.

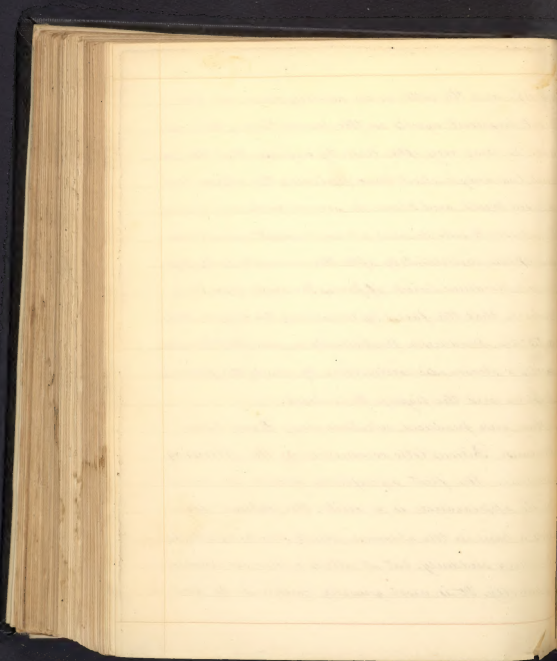
"Bilious Colic", according to the arrangement of Professor Chapman, is ranked among the diseases of the "Digestive System". It may be defined, a painful, spasmodic contraction of an intestine, accompanied by vomiting of bile, constipation and increased arterial action. It is regarded by some writers, as a "Bilious Fever" thrown upon the bowels.

The causes which produce it, are various, but the most common, are indigestible food, a redundancy of acid bile, long continued constipation, hard and feces, and the external application of cold, particularly to the lower extremities. It appears to me, that these two last conjoined, the former as a predis-

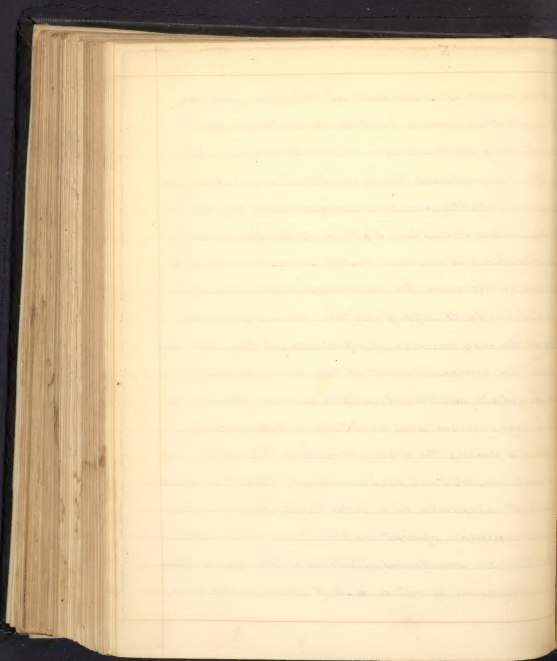


posing, and the latter as an exciting cause, are the most frequent agents in the production of this disease. We may very often learn by enquiry, that the patient has only a short time preceding the attack, been exposed to cold, and I have in several instances, known the spasms to subside, and all unpleasant symptoms disappear, immediately after the evacuation by glysters of a hardened lump of faeces. In such cases it is probable that the faeces by remaining too long in the intestine, produces a predisposition, and that the cold excites a spasmodic contraction, by which the faeces is grasped and the passage thus closed.

When once produced, whatever may have been the cause, Bilious colic commences in the following manner. The first symptom which we have of its appearance, is a chill. The patient soon feels a pain in the abdomen, which sometimes attacks him very suddenly, but at others comes on more gradually. It is most generally confined to one



spot, which if examined at this time, feels as though there were a knot in the intestine. In almost every obstinate case, which I have ever met with, I have found this to be situated in some part occupied by the small intestines, while on the contrary, when it has been light and easily removed by injections, it has been located somewhere in the course of the colon. In this manner I have accounted satisfactorily to myself, for the obstinacy of some and the easy removal of other cases. At the same time with the commencement of the pain, we may observe febrile excitement, which is soon followed by anorexia, nausea and vomiting of bilious matter. There is during the whole progress of the disease, obstinate constipation and considerable thirst, and the patient complains of a bitter taste. These are the most common symptoms which we meet with, but there are sometimes affections of the eyes, as blindness, prostration of vision &c. As it advances, the con-



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I have never thought of my own country as the only
one. I have desired to know more of the world,
and have been enabled to do so, through the
kindness of friends who have been good to me,
and the more I know of the world, the more I love my
country.

because, according to the law of the land, the
 government is bound to protect the rights of the
 people, and to see that the law is executed
 in accordance with the principles of justice
 and equity. It is the duty of the government
 to see that the law is executed in accordance
 with the principles of justice and equity, and
 to see that the law is executed in accordance
 with the principles of justice and equity.

[illegible]

[illegible]

in the country around the country in all the
house, in case with an important business for all
at all house up. The old house is made up of all
one circle to a new house, some of the old

The necessity of this is urged, not only by the cries of the patient for relief, but also by the tendency to a return of the gastric irritation and the liability to gangrene. The facility of description, I shall divide the remedies, which are employed for this purpose into. 1st Cathartics. 2nd Those, which are given per animum, and 3rd external applications.

Cathartics In treating of these articles in the disease under consideration, it is difficult to say, which are the strongest claims to our attention. In some cases, we find that the most drastic purgatives are requisite, while in another, which, in appearance, is precisely similar, the mildest laxatives are far superior in efficacy. And as I have had reason to fear those, which are not of a very active nature, I will commence with them.

Castor Oil is, perhaps, oftener than any other medicine used in this case. But to derive any advantage from it, we must be careful to select that which is most disagreeable to the patient; and to give it in small and

frequently repeated doses. It is usually taken, either warm or with water or wine, but I think a better way of administering it, is to pour it on hot coffee, and drink as soon as sufficiently cool. The olive oil being less objectionable, would probably be found beneficial, when the stearic acid cannot be taken. As the latter however is more active, it is generally preferred when admissible.

The Neutral Salts are also among the most valuable cathartics in this affection. The Sulphate of Magnesia, which is the best of these, is said to be particularly applicable to all diseases which are attended with gastric excitement, so much so, that it was frequently been known to remain in the stomach, after every other article had been rejected. Almost the same may be said of what are called "Patent Purgative Powders." I have witnessed the employment of this combination in one case of Bilious Colic, and in this it evinced its superiority to all the remedies various and variously been tried.

Among the more active purgatives generally given in this disease, are calomel, jalap, rhubarb, gamboge, scammony, &c. These may be administered, either alone, or in combination with each other. A favorite prescription of Professor Chapman, is calomel and opium united. In cases of great danger, two or three grains of the latter, with three or fifteen of the former, may be given every four or four hours. He says, by uniting the two, we obtain a great advantage. As soon as the opium begins to act, the spasmodic contraction will generally give way, and the calomel being thus enabled to operate, produces copious evacuations of the bowels, and the disease is entirely removed. The calomel is also more apt to be retained in the stomach, when used in conjunction with opium.

It is a common practice among medical men of the country, to give a combination of scammony, marsh-mallows, and cream tartar, prepa-

red as follows. R^o. Gumae. ℥℥. ʒiv
Sulph. Tart. Pol. ʒss
Manna ʒij
Ac. tart. ℥i
St. Asae

By this a wine glassfull may be given every ten or fifteen minutes. This very often proves successful as does also, the Symplicia cathartica, either alone or mixed with the Symplicia chloride of Mercury. There are other cathartics which may be employed in this affection, but I believe I have enumerated the most important. Some Practitioners have recommended the swallowing of leaden bullets, on the supposition, that by their weight they would force themselves through the constricted part of the intestine, but these seem much more likely to create, than to remove an obstruction. It appears to me, impossible that they can, act by this gravity, because the intestines do not lie in a straight line from the pylorus to the anus, and though this were actually the case, we cannot suppose that the weight of a bullet as large as a man could swallow, would

it be of any advantage. I once gave it, in the dose of
six ounces, to a patient laboring under the disease,
but it produced no remarkable effect. It continued with
me the day of the celebration of winter time, it
came from him without producing any effect. It is
a very popular opinion in the country, that it was
first administered even in the smallest quantity,
with certainly better than the effect the benefit of the
strong the patient in fifteen or twenty minutes, but
for a constant, you can get some medicine, any one takes
it. This is not, however, the great indication for the
minds, don't appear to produce much good.

It will not be proper while using callosities or emulsion
you is the indication of the stomach should continue
with to administer mild aperients: in sections these are
almost innumerable, but the most common are the ex-
cellent equal parts of olive oil, emollients and mixture
of some dissolved in a pint of water or milk, half a
pint, emollients a pint and half these mixed or sub



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the smoke, fill the bowl with tobacco, and incline
it, then cover it with a rag, and introduce the pipe
into the rectum, close through the bowl. A particu-
lar apparatus has been invented for this purpose,
but it cannot always be had. It should, however, be
recalled, that tobacco should never be used, ex-
cepting as a dernier resort. The powerful sedative
effects of this article, have been known to destroy
the patient, almost immediately after its admi-
nistration. Mr. Earle of London, has proposed the
introduction of a suppository, as a means of
guarding against the danger which arises from
the injection. A quill of tobacco may be deposited
in the rectum, it is said, with as much effect as the
smoke or infusion, and may be withdrawn, imme-
diately on the appearance of dangerous symptoms.
This statement has been fully corroborated by three
Practitioners.

An enema constituted of twenty or thirty grains of



iodinated antimony, dissolved in half a pint of warm water has been strongly recommended in this disease, by Professor Chapman. He says, "When the effect is full and complete, an extraordinary degree of muscular debility takes place, without, however, producing, so far as I have observed, any permanent mischief." He has given it in the quantity of a drachm, and has succeeded with it, after every thing else had been tried in vain. I have seen it employed in two cases, from the result of which, I am inclined to believe, that it is one of the very best remedies. In one instance, forty grains of it were injected, to relieve the pain, which, notwithstanding the use of very large quantities of opium, continued so violent, that it threatened to destroy the patient, but disappeared immediately after the administration of the glyster.

It is necessary to bear in mind, that like cathartics the mildest annals will sometimes suc-



and, when the more stimulating course failed. He should not, however, despair of effecting a cure when he has tried one set of remedies without success, but resort to others, and throw him through the same catarrh. The more introduction of a cathartic into the system was sometimes put an end to the disease, after it has baffled us in all our preceding attempts.

Properly directed, may be resorted to with a considerable degree of confidence. The safest and best method, is to inject a large quantity of tepid water, by a proper syringe, which will throw it into the rectum in a continued stream, and with some force. The patient drinking copiously at the same time, thus serving to increase the quantity in the canal, in so the distension, and finally a general drunk, with the happiest effects.

Before concluding the treatment of Solinus's



I have only to observe of these remedial agents are
employed extremely in the measure of exercising
the power. Cold water directed on the extremities
in a moderate and a moderate temperature of the
hot & Douch. I mention somewhat similar treatment
proposed in the Edinburgh Med. Jour. which in some
cases have been known to be service. The patient is to
be covered up & so, are made to make a cast as the
cast goes at a constant attachment. At the same time,
movements of cold water are to be directed on the cast
and even higher when this must be continued, for we
are in danger of a steel and not treatment, when that
time, though this will generally be the case under
these. The exercise does not at all increase the pa-
tient's strength, but rather adds to it, in some way or
another his arms are affected where this limited
circulation with every thing else had joined. In
one person, the disease had come on with an ex-
treme tenderness and the patient had been for a



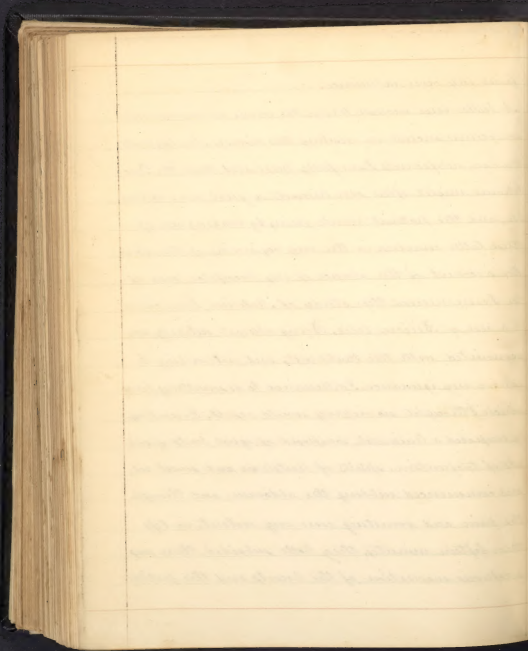
week, tormented with a violent pain and con-
vulsions, which could be stopped neither by anodynes nor
any other medicines, the sharpest glysters being uter-
ned unavailing, and all kinds of fomentations thrown
up, soon after they were administered and by the above
mentioned method, a stop was made in the pain in
minutes, and the patient recovered. It is well known
that the skin of some persons is so insensible that it is ex-
posed to cold it will bring on tetanus; but notwithstanding
this is a practice which seems so hazardous as that
just stated, should be attended with caution.

The various dyspepsias which I observed were treated
by a set of those remedies which are used to restore the action
of the stomach and bowels in the other stages of the
disease. To these may also be added the use of opium
and alcohol in a strength of about 10 grains of opium
and 10 drops of alcohol in a quantity of water to be taken
four or five times a day. In the case of the patient just
mentioned, the use of this practice, I saw very little effect.



from my own experience.

A blister large enough to cover the whole abdomen, will sometimes succeed in arresting this disease. Analogous to this, an subsociety I am fully persuaded, that the Practitioner might often save himself a great deal of trouble, and the patient much pain, by making use of these latter remedies, in the very beginning of the disease. On account of the absence of my preceptor, soon after I commenced the study of medicine, I was called to a case of Bilious Colic. Being almost entirely unacquainted with the treatment, and not willing to expose my ignorance, I determined to do something from which I thought no injury would result. I accordingly prepared a liniment, composed of equal parts of spirits of turpentine, spirits of castor oil and sweet oil, and commenced rubbing the abdomen, and though the pain and vomiting were very violent, in less than fifteen minutes, they both subsided, there was a copious evacuation of the bowels, and the patient



was relieved. I have resorted to the same practice, in
two or three cases since, and although the benefit
was not so great as in that just stated, still the
pain and irritation were so completely calmed,
that there was no difficulty in procuring the op-
eration of a cathartic.

Should all the remedies which I have enumerated,
fail, we have still one resort. Mercury, urged to Gal-
viation, will frequently snatch the Patient from the
apparent grasp of death. Much might be said, of the
utility of this medicine in Colic, but to ensure its
employment, it is necessary to mention only, that
among its advocates are Physick and Chapman.

